DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 100 429 JC 750 058

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TITLE Conceptualizing the Learning Center.
NOTE 8p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Audiovisual Instruction; Differentiated Staffs; Facility Planning; *Individualized Instruction; *Instructional Materials Centers; *Instructional Media; *Junior Colleges; *Library Facilities; Remedial Instruction; Resource Centers; Self Directed Classrooms

ABSTRACT

The learning center is an integrated, fully-coordinated facility, combining a number of traditional library, media development, and personalized learning functions. Conceptualizing the learning center is facilitated through a description of the premises for such a center, the components, and guidelines for developing a learning center. De Anza College's Learning Center personnel chart is included as an example of one possible personnel configuration. An activity model for learner-centered education shows the role played by the learning center in providing access to learning. (AH)

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# Conceptualizing the Learning Center

by

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Though the split between print and non-print professionals--probably not as much of a result of dichotomous basic philosophies as a function of job and position wariness--still exists in many institutions; in one newly emerging organization, the learning center, the split is healing. It is this learning center, an integrated, fully-coordinated facility, combining a number of media functions which may well provide an institutional framework in which emphasis can at last be placed on the products of learning with less regard for line-staff position. The following conceptualizes such a center.

What's in a name? While "Learning Resources Centers" are becoming abundant at various levels throughout the U.S., the emphasis of such a name is on resources, things to be deposited. "Learning Resource Centers" may then be those centers combining conventional library and audio visual functions. Such centers act as service stations, supportive in concept, they were developed to accomodate the self-contained classroom model. The "Learning Center" as a name, however, places the emphasis on "learning." Though "library" and "audio visual" functions have not changed, their scope and institutional patterns have evolved--resulting in a conglomerate, a consortium of several specialists. And under the emphasis "learning," the evolution may well quicken in the coming years.

The "Learning Center" has a pretentious sound. But an analysis of its underlying concepts should support this name choice. The premises for such a center are founded in the following:

1. Media, regardless of their formats, should be viewed first for their informational and stimulus possibilities and second for their format potentials.

2. Schools provide an access to learning, not learning. The instructor is an engineer of learning environments, a manager of information, and a learning counselor.

3. Media extends an instructor, both buoying up his instruction and enlarging that instruction. At times, mediation may provide a peripheral and/or reinforcing stimulus and at other times it may provide all of the instruction.

4. Learning and instruction are not one and the same. A school provides for learning, and instruction is but one element in the learning milieu.

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5. The wide variety in type and emphasis of stimulus media should be developed to maximize learning potentials. The multiplicity of educational goals and goal paths must be provided for through a plurality of stimuli.

6. An integrated approach to learning is most economical in terms of all human and non-human resources.

7. Though education is at best an imprecise "science," a technology of instruction is now becoming available and that technology can best be introduced through a learning center.

Definition. The following provides the grossest but perhaps the most understandable general definition for a learning center:

Components

1. Traditional library services encompassing the basic supply-support functions of selection, evaluation, distribution/retrieval, description, and storage.

2. Traditional audio visual services encompassing the supply-support function in non-print media, and hardware systems as well as production functions and some utilization technology.

3. Instructional development providing for an analysis of the components of a learning system and for engineering of appropriate learning models to meet individual learning needs.

4. Promotion of innovative learning environments appropriate to a number of levels of learning from highly structured packaged learning situations, to minimally directed learning situations, and to situations where the learner has complete control of his objective path delineation.

All of the above fit well within a general learner-centered model (see Figure I). Such an activity model describes most of the formal learning activity in a school yet does not necessarily define the actual place where such activity occurs. As space allows, such activities will occur as a function of a learning philosophy, either within or physically outside the L.C. building (a learning center does not, of course, have to be within one building; a case can be developed for a completely decentralized but still highly cohesive set of learning centers). For instance, in order to serve the learning needs of a community of students, milieus must be available for all types of learning from remediation to advanced, self-directed research activity. With remediation, tutorial activity including both packaged media and human tutors might well take place within the learning center.

Non-traditional approaches to learning can be instructionally developed and then may or may not occur within the center. Approaches such as complete packaging, packaging of mini-courses and mini-units, gaming, computer-assisted, -monitored, and -managed instruction, psycho-dramas, etc., should be planned for when developing a learning center. The point, here, would be that though

all such activity would fit within an umbrella-like learning center concept, local option would be used to determine the extent and location of such activity. Such activities might be shared, also. Thus a coordinated learning lab (totally packaged learning; supplementary media; partially mediated instruction; duplicate classroom media) could be centered totally in the L.C. or might be decentralized to a number of locations across the campus. However, the development of media for such lab activity would be processed within the instructional development framework of the L.C.

Central to an integrated approach to learning is the necessity of utilizing available resources. Thus, counselors normally involved in program and personal counseling take on a new dimension as learning counselors. As such, they would participate in evaluation, in the development of learner profiles and in the instructional development process as specialists in the psychology of learning.

## Getting Started

The development of a learning center is the process of planning for the introduction of a number of functions which will initially face resistance from both within and from outside itself. Thus, once an agreement has been made to integrate a number of learning functions, a series of programs can be utilized to involve students and faculty in the change process. These programs while developing and implementing a general, pre-developed L.C. master plan will also act as diffusion and adoption mechanisms within the total institution. The presentation of a plan here is further suggestive of the concept "learning center."

1. Involvement of faculty and students in all activities, including initial planning. But even at initial stages, be ready to lead. Focus attention on the learner and the learning process.

2. Develop the school's concept of the self-learner. The self-learner by one definition is one who is able to determine his needs and to participate in the development of his own program to meet those needs. One school may, for instance, utilize its librarians in the development of the acquisition of information process and may utilize its counselors in the development of goal paths. The choice of such personnel for certain developmental tasks is determined as a function of that school's definition of the self-learner and of the school's available personnel resources.

3. Expansion of collections though a traditional concept is necessary for the center. Exploration, evaluation, and acquisition provide learning experiences. Involve students as well as faculty in this process.

4. Production and engineering activities must be defined. Once such definitions have been made, a whole range of unknown resources for such activity may be found either on campus or within the local community.

5. Learner and task analysis as concepts must be delimited and then institutionalized. Probably only through institutionalization of such activity can any appreciable change in education take place.

6. Development of new learning environments which though by far the easiest to conceptualize and the most "fun" at which to work are still difficult. Educators and students must be brought to accept learning labs, gaming, mass informational devices such as computers, etc., and money must be located to support such activity.

7. Selective dissemination projects must be evolved to both determine the informational needs of students and faculty and the ways to meet such needs.

8. Workshops should be set up for the improvement of learning through behaviorally-oriented re-analysis of instructional technologies.

9. As a function of all of the above and as the program evolves, personnel to meet needs must be hired. Such personnel may well fall under several broad categories.

    a. Supply-Support Function. This is the traditional function of any library of software and hardware and encompasses the basic selection, evaluation, acquisition, distribution/retrieval, description, and storage functions.

    b. Production Function. When media is commercially unavailable, it must be provided. Personnel to generate new media (16 and 8mm film, computer programs, video signals, etc.) and conventional media such as printed matter, slides, tapes, etc., must be located.

    c. Instructional Function. The learning center will provide a wide variety of instructional activities not tied to any other curriculum than its own. There may be activities such as training paraprofessionals, workshops to improve instruction, etc.

    d. Consultative Function. Specialists will be needed to work with faculty and students in the selection, procurement, design, development, and execution of systematically designed stimulus material and environments.

    e. Administrative Function. Someone with authority must be available to allocate resources, tie program segments together, stimulate evaluation, etc. Ideally such a person is a communicator, a public relations person, a behavioral scientist, and a systems analyst.

De Anza College's Learning Center personnel chart may be somewhat indicative of one possible personnel configuration (see Figure II).

Of necessity, the above has been general. Ideally, the learning center can be what an institution will make it. As a catalyst, such a center presents possibilities for making truly significant changes in the process of education and consequently in its products.

# AN ACTIVITY MODEL FOR LEARNER-CENTERED EDUCATION

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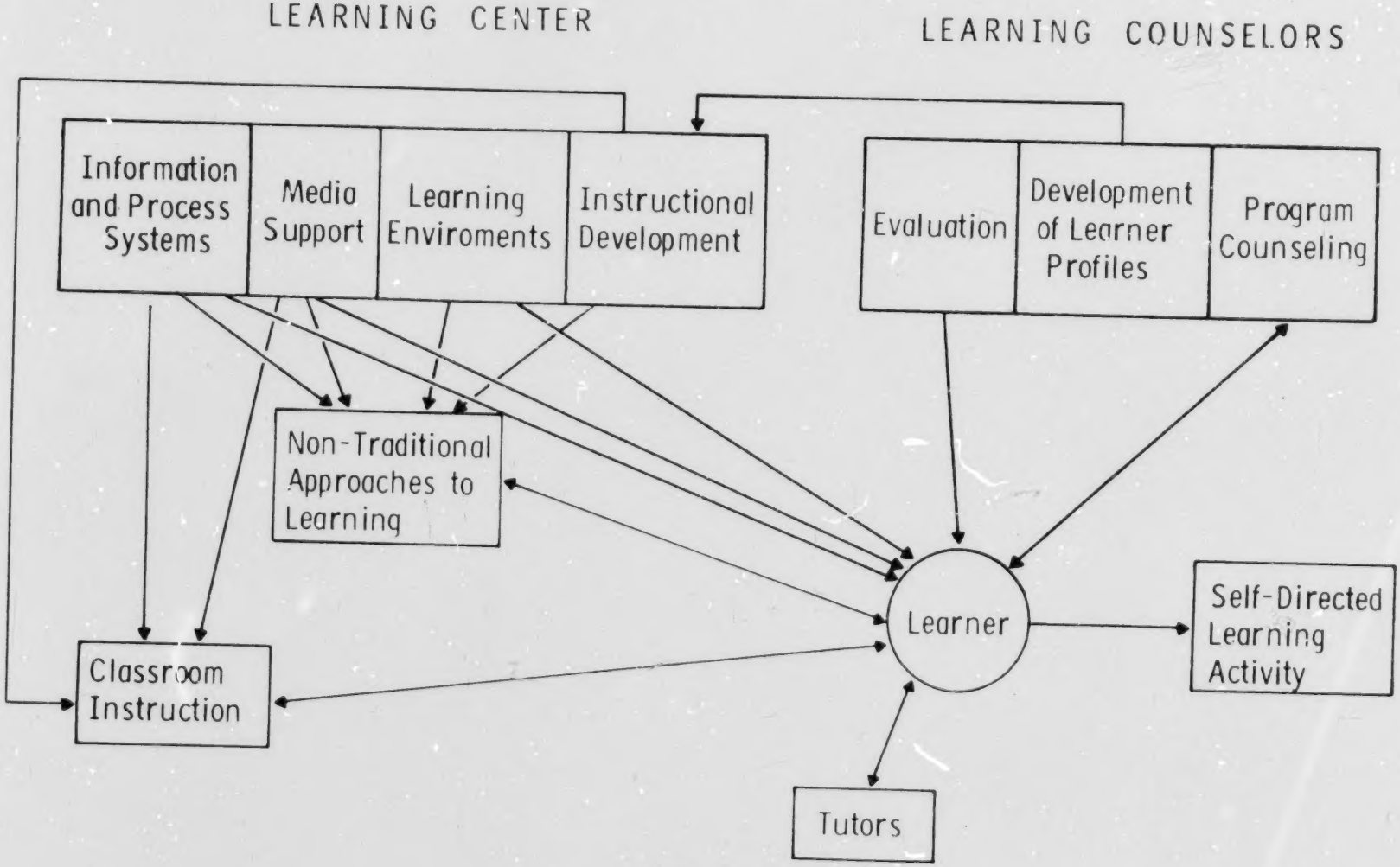


Figure I

# DE ANZA COLLEGE
# LEARNING CENTER

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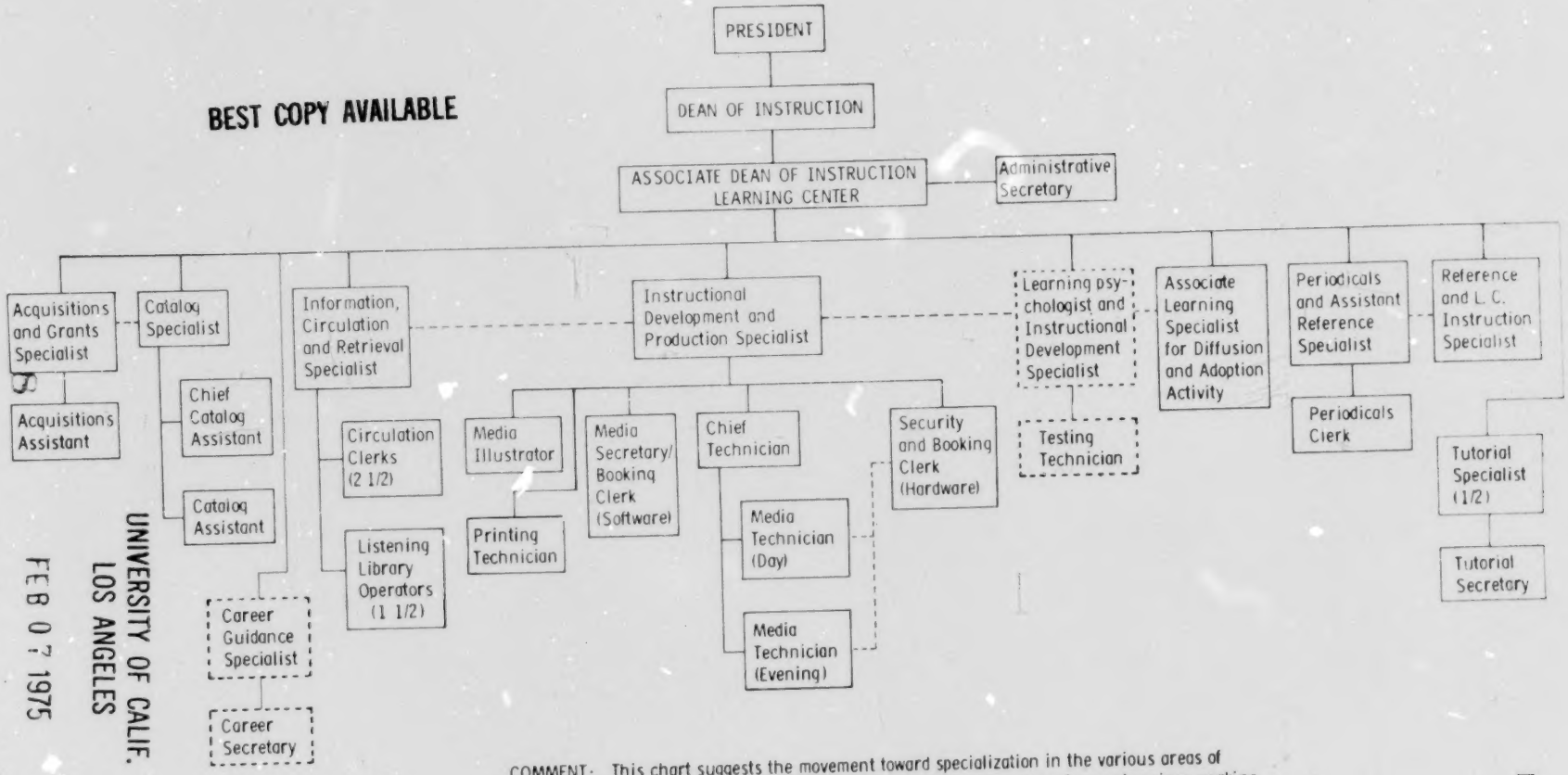


COMMENT: This chart suggests the movement toward specialization in the various areas of learning technology and service. Additional staff is required in a learning center since working directly with students and faculty in applying and developing instructional activities requires much more time and specialization than does conventional "library" and "audio-visual" activity. As center growth demands, additional staff in such areas as computer applications, evaluation, cinematography, and systems will be needed.

Figure II

CLEARINGHOUSE FOR JUNIOR COLLEGE INFORMATION
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